

INFORMATION FOR THE PRESS

United States Department of Agriculture

Release - Immediate

Washington, D. C., September 22, 1938

TRUMPETER SWAN HOLDING OWN AGAINST EXTINCTION

- - -

Trumpeter swans apparently are just about holding their own in a battle against extinction, says the U.S. Biological Survey. They are the largest North American wild fowl, weighing at least 25 pounds and having a wingspread of 8 feet.

This summer's count of 148 birds in the United States is 10 less than last year, but another census to be made shortly may reveal more birds. Survey official explained that several broods of cygnets, or young swans, hidden by dense vegetation may have been overlooked.

The census made simultaneously by the Survey and the Department of Interior covered the only two places in this country where the birds still nest--the Red Rock Lakes Migratory Waterfowl Refuge in southwestern Montana and the nearby Yellowstone National Park. In early times when the birds were more abundant they probably bred from southern Alaska and Canada as far south as Indiana, Wisconsin, Iowa, Montana, and Idaho.

Most of the nonbreeding birds in southwestern Montana apparently remain on the Lakes in the Yellowstone Park in summer, while the majority of breeding birds use the Red Rock Lakes Refuge. This year 51 cygnets were found on the Red Rock Lakes and 4 on or near Yellowstone Park. Last year the number of young on both places totaled 77 -- 51 on the refuge and 26 in Yellowstone. Ninety-three adult birds were observed this year as compared with 81 last year.

On the Red Rock Lakes Refuge the birds have again shown an increase, the count this year showing 97 birds as compared with 90 last year and 57 in 1936.

The number of cygnets counted this year, was the same as last year, 51, but there was an increase in adults from 39 to 46.

The 26,600-acre Red Rock Lakes Refuge established April 23, 1935, by an Executive Order has been developed by the Biological Survey especially for the protection and perpetuation of the trumpeter swans. In addition to the swans, more than 200 other species of birds, including many nesting wild ducks, use the refuge. A dam maintains constant water levels and small artificial islands built in the two main lakes are used by nesting swans. These islands covered with vegetation resemble muskrat lodges on which swans habitually nest.

From the time the ice leaves the lakes until early August when the young swans are fairly grown, A. V. Hull, refuge manager, does not permit anyone to venture on or near the lakes where the birds nest. In past years persons and livestock disturbed the birds.

The trumpeter swan probably was never as abundant as the whistling swan, which it closely resembles, and for some time has been regarded as a "receding species." At a distance the two birds cannot be told apart. The trumpeter swan, however, produces a louder and more far-reaching call.

- - H - -